(b) whether the Ministry has looked into it and is planning to issue visas to Pakistani nationals for the whole of National Capital Region; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes.

(b) and (c) Visas are issued to Pakistan nationals in terms of the India-Pakistan Visa Agreement of 1982 which provides for city/place specific visas for nationals of either country.

Shortage of houses

2720. MS. MABEL REBELLO:
SHRI B.J. PANDA:

Will the Minister of HOUSING AND URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has set up a "High-level Task Force" on affordable housing;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the current shortage of houses in the country-both LIG and MIG;

(d) whether Government proposes to involve private sector to address this problem; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION (KUMARI SELJA): (a) and (b) A Task Force has been set up by this Ministry on 15th January, 2008 to look into various aspects of providing "Affordable Housing for All" and recommend ways and means of enhancing accessibility of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and the Low Income Group (LIG) to housing with suitable governmental support and recommend ways and means of enhancing accessibility of the Middle Income Group (MIG) to housing, apart from developing innovative financial instruments for bringing flexibility in the market and making recommendations with regard to fiscal and spatial incentives for increasing supply of house.

The Task Force has been asked to submit its report to the Government within a period of four months from the date for constitution *i.e.* 15th January, 2008.

(c) According to the estimates made the Technical Group constituted by the Ministry for assessment of the urban housing shortage at the end of the Tenth Five Year Plan, the total housing shortage for the Economically Weaker Sections/Low Income Group (LIG) is 24.7 million dwelling units. A combined housing shortage of 0.04 million dwelling units has been estimated for the Middle Income Group (MIG) and High Income Group (HIG).

(d) and (e) The National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy (NUHHP), 2007 encourages public-private partnerships relating to construction of houses and setting up of Greenfield towns. However, the subjects 'land' and 'colonization' come under the purview of State Governments and it is for the State Governments to take appropriate measures for involving private sectors.

Modern facilities in emigration offices

2721. SHRI AMIR ALAM KHAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that modern emigration facilities are lacking in the emigration offices in the country causing difficulties to the people at large;

(b) if so, whether Government has any proposal to introduce e-emigration to make the clearance process faster and easier;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (d) In view of the growing number of Indian citizens emigrating overseas for employment and to make the emigration process simple, efficient and transparent, steps have been taken to introduce e-governance in emigration and to modernise the offices of the Protectors of Emigrants (POEs). As a part of the e-governance project, all the eight offices of Protector of Emigrants (POEs) at Delhi, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Cochin and Chennai have already been computerized. To ensure comprehensive e-emigration, the e-governance project envisages connecting all stakehlders in the same electronic platform.

Shipyard workers in USA

2722. SHRI MAHENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that recently hundreds of shipyard workers who went from India to a small town in Gulf of Mexico in USA have been protesting against in-human conditions and wage cuts at employers camp;

(b) if so, the kind of help that has been provided to these hapless workers who were lured to work in Catarina hit areas; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) As per the reports received from the Indian Missions in USA, 590 Indian workers were recruited with M/s Signal International, a marine fabrication company, in Mississippi and Texas. They had gone to US on H2B Visas (Guest workers Visa Programme) valid initially for 10 months, extendable at the discretion of the employer and the US authorities. Workers were aggrieved on account of alleged poor accommodation and amenities, deductions from their salary for accommodation, food, electricity, water and alleged non-fulfilment of initial commitment of permanent residency status etc. On 6th March, 2008, the Indian workers demonstrated outside the office of their employer voicing their demands. They also met Indian Ambassador on 27.3.2008 and pressed for the said demands.

(b) and (c) The Indian Mission in USA has approached the US Government to conduct a detailed investigation into the matter and take remedial measures. The Indian Mission has also taken steps to withhold visas from the main US recruiters involved to prevent them from entering India to resume their recruiting operations.

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has suspended the license of M/s Dewan Consultants and M/s S. Mansur & Co., Mumbai, blacklisted the foreign employer and is also initiating legal action against the Recruiting Agent for violation of Emigration Act, 1983.